

ENGL 1105 – Sexual Politics
Sluts, Spinsters, and Drag Queens: Sexual Norms and Deviations
MWF 11:15 to 12:05

Instructor: Christine Yao

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2 to 4 in the Hans Bethe common room or after class

Course Description

What do sluts, spinsters, and drag queens have in common? They expose the excesses and deviations in the spectrum of human sexuality, thereby drawing attention to the dubious status of what is considered to be “normal.” Students will learn how to analyze, discuss, and write about a wide range of cultural objects which include the 18th century epistolary novel *The Coquette* to the musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* to a Japanese-Canadian graphic novel to the reality show *RuPaul’s Drag Race* to the latest indie games by transwomen. The course will also be an introduction to a variety of theoretical and philosophical texts. Learning how to think critically is imperative and what will be emphasized is that writing is a form of thinking.

Some content will be sexually explicit. Appropriate discretion is advised.

Learning Outcomes

This course is designed so that you can achieve the following objectives:

- Comprehend and analyze texts
- Development of thesis statements and essay organization
- Confidence and skill in communication and argumentation
- Writing skills applicable to communicating in any medium and discipline
- Critical thinking about ideas, particularly privilege
- And last but not least, you are here to dialogue with your peers and, hopefully, spark your interest in new areas.

Required Texts (available at Buffalo Street Books)

Hedwig and the Angry Inch by John Cameron Mitchell

Skim by Jillian and Mariko Tamaki

The Coquette by Hannah Webster Foster

The Sluts by Dennis Cooper

Passing by Nella Larsen

These books are available at Buffalo Street Books and can all be ordered, by telephone, or preferably, by email, and will be delivered to our first (*or whichever class you deem best*) class meeting. Please note that there will be no taxes or shipping fees charged for any books ordered for class. When you place your order, be sure to state your name, contact information (telephone or email), what class (professor and course) you're ordering for, the books being ordered, and your credit card number including expiration date. We accept MC, VISA and

Discover but can also accept payment via PayPal, as long as you have a previously established PayPal account. (No AmEx.) Confirmation will be sent by email.

You can order by phone at (607) 273-8246 or by email at BuffaloStreetBooks@hotmail.com. The store is located in the DeWitt Mall on Buffalo Street between Cayuga & Tioga Streets in Downtown Ithaca., www.BuffaloStreetBooks.com.

All other readings will be made available on Blackboard or their online locations will be otherwise indicated. You will be expected to print them and bring them to class on the scheduled days.

You are strongly encouraged to highlight and annotate your readings for your own purposes.

Attendance and Absences

Attendance is more than a requirement: it is a necessity for your own academic development and to maximize the usefulness of the course for you. You are expected to have read the scheduled material.

Late arrivals will also be documented. If you will be observing a religious holiday, please let me know beforehand. Please also let me know if you will be having medical absences. If there are other emergencies, let me know.

Absences: Regardless of your attendance, you will be responsible for missed work. You are expected to email me a paragraph analyzing the reading for the class that you have missed.

Classroom Etiquette

Respect one another according to university policies and regulations about harassment and discrimination. I take these issues very seriously as does the university. Discrimination and harassment in either discussion or your writing will not be accepted.

NO cell phones/texting. If you bring a laptop, please mute your sound and refrain from chatting and the use of social networking.

Academic Integrity

You can easily prevent plagiarism, passing off the work, words, or ideas of another as your own, by acknowledging the original sources of those ideas. Cornell takes a definitive stance on adherence to policies on plagiarism, whether intentional or not. For complete guidelines, please reference Cornell's *Policy Notebook* on the "Code of Academic Integrity" and "Acknowledging the Work of Others" (<http://www.theuniversityfaculty.cornell.edu/AcadInteg/code.html>) If you are uncertain about how to acknowledge a source, you can also ask me or consult Ann Raimés' *Pocket Keys for Writers 2009 MLA Update Edition 3*. **If you do choose to plagiarize, you will fail the course.** Thus, if you are unsure whether or not to cite, it is always safer to acknowledge rather than ignore a source. Proper citation enhances your work.

Students with Disabilities

Disabilities (from the Office of Workforce Diversity, Equity, and Life Quality): "In compliance with the Cornell University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester, except in unusual circumstances, so that arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations."

Grading Guidelines

Class Participation 25%

This is a seminar not a lecture so you will be expected to contribute to discussion. I know it can be difficult to think of comments on the spot or some people may be shyer than others, so it may be helpful to bring a written comment/collection of points (that will not be collected!) in order to help you articulate yourself. I am interested in what you have to say. Engaged participation is a skill that you will be developing over the course of the term.

You will also be given opportunities to do extra credit assignments.

Presentation/Leading Class Discussion 15%

I will be asking each of you to do a presentation for the class that has three components: your own close reading, outside research, and then a question as a jumping off point for your peers' discussion of the text for that day. Shift into a presenter or leadership persona for this moment.

Critical Essay Assignments 60%

First Essay (2-3 pages, Thesis) 5%
Second Essay (2-3 pages, Close Reading) 5%
Third Essay (4-5 pages, Close Reading) 10%
Fourth Essay (4-5 pages, Research) 10%
Encyclopedia Entry (Research) 15%
Creative (6-8 pages) 15%

There will be assigned topics in relationship to each paper. After each paper, both the working and final drafts please include one additional page of **Afterthoughts. This is your chance to examine what you have written about and discuss what you think you have not included.**

Some of the papers will have working draft deadlines and will be examined in workshop by your peers. Working drafts are not graded. Do not throw any drafts or peer comments away. This class is all about revision. Revising offers you the chance to further research your argument, reexamine your ideas, and/or reorganize your essay. When revisions are due, I expect you to do more than just correct typos and grammar mistakes, or just answer your peer's comments/my feedback. I imagine you will reveal something new, incorporate your previous ideas, and radically create an entirely new paper.

Formatting Assignments

You will need to place your name, the assignment number and an interesting title at the top of your essays. Along the way you will learn the importance of intellectual property and how to cite your references according to the MLA (Modern Language Association) format.

All papers are typed, in 12-point type with standard margins. You will be required to use the MLA (Modern Language Association) format for citing sources.

You must bring a hardcopy of your essay to the beginning of class on the due date. I do not accept papers electronically. Unexcused late papers will receive an entire letter grade deduction for each day they are late.

Conferences

You are required to meet with me, at minimum, two times during the term. I am more than happy to meet with you anytime if you cannot make my office hours. Please come and see me if you have questions or concerns.

Additional Resources

John S. Knight Institute Writing Workshop: 607-255-6349;
http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute.walkin.htm

Gannett Health Services: 607-255-5155; Counseling and Psychological Services 607-255-5155

Calendar

Unit #1: Double Standards?

Skills: Thesis Statements, Close Reading, Citations

Week 1, January 21-25

Jan 21: Introduction, syllabus

 “I like a look of Agony” by Emily Dickinson

Jan 23: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1, 2, 3 (King James Version) (Blackboard)

Jan 25: “Sex Without Love” by Sharon Olds (Blackboard)

 Sonnet 129 by William Shakespeare (Blackboard)

Week 2, January 28 – February 1

Jan 28: **Essay 1 final (2-3 pages)**

 “To His Coy Mistress” by Andrew Marvell (Blackboard)

 “Teenage Dream” by Katy Perry (Youtube)

 “Give Me Everything” by Pitbull ft. Ne-Yo (Youtube)

Jan 30: “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses” by Louis Althusser (Blackboard)

Feb 1: “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses” by Louis Althusser (Blackboard)

 “Dominoes” by The Big Pink (Youtube)

 “Girls Fall Like Dominoes” by Nicki Minaj (Youtube)

 “I Just Had Sex” by Lonely Island ft. Akon (Youtube)

Unit #2: I Don’t Give a Damn About My Bad Reputation – or do I? Discourse and Identity

Skills: Paragraph Organization, Close Reading with Theory, Critiquing Film and Comics

Week 3, February 4-8

Feb 4: Selections from *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon (Blackboard)

 “The Danger of the Single Story” by Chimamanda Adichie (TED Talk)

Feb 6: Selections from *The Psychic Life of Power* by Judith Butler (Blackboard)
“Call Me Maybe” by Carly Rae Jepsen
“The Boy is Mine” by Brandy and Monica
“Too Many Dicks” by Flight of the Conchords

Feb 8: **Essay 2 final (3 pages)**
Library research session at Olin Library, Room 106

Week 4, February 11-15
Feb 11: *Skim* by Mariko and Jillian Tamaki
Feb 13: *Skim* by Mariko and Jillian Tamaki
Feb 15: *Skim* by Mariko and Jillian Tamaki

Week 5, February 18-22
Feb 18: *Mean Girls* (2004) dir. Mark Waters
Feb 20: *Mean Girls* (2004) dir. Mark Waters
Feb 22: *Mean Girls* (2004) dir. Mark Waters

Unit #3: Sluts versus Spinsters and the Limits of Acceptability
Skills: Essay Organization, Historical Contexts, Reading Secondary Sources

Week 6, February 25 – March 1
Feb 25: **Essay 3 final (4-5 pages)**
The Coquette by Hannah Webster Foster
Feb 27: *The Coquette* by Hannah Webster Foster
March 1: **Class canceled**

Week 7, March 4-8
March 4: *The Coquette* by Hannah Webster Foster
March 6: *The Coquette* by Hannah Webster Foster
March 8: *The Coquette* by Hannah Webster Foster

Week 8, March 11-15
March 11: Selection from *The Country of Pointed Firs* by Sarah Orne Jewett (Blackboard)
March 13: “A New England Nun” by Mary Wilkins Freeman
March 15: *The Sluts* by Dennis Cooper

Week 9, **Spring Break**, March 18-22

Week 10, March 25-29
March 25: *The Sluts* by Dennis Cooper
March 27: *The Sluts* by Dennis Cooper
March 29: *The Sluts* by Dennis Cooper

Unit #4: “Your Whole F---ing Culture Alienates Me”: The Problematics of Passing
Skills: Using Secondary Sources and Doing Original Research

Week 11, April 1-5

April 1: **Essay 4 final (4 pages)**

“Ain’t I a Woman?” by Sojourner Truth (online)

April 3: LIM by Merritt Kopas (online)

dys4ia by Anna Anthropy (online)

April 5: **Class canceled**

Week 12, April 8-12

April 8: Library visit

April 10: *Passing* by Nella Larsen

April 12: *Passing* by Nella Larsen

Week 13, April 15-19

April 15: *Passing* by Nella Larsen

April 17: *Passing* by Nella Larsen

April 19: *Passing* by Nella Larsen

Unit #5: Against the Gender Binary: Does It Get Better?

Skills: Style, Synthesizing Skills, Critically Creative

Week 14, April 22-26

April 22: “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” by Judith Butler

April 24: *RuPaul’s Drag Race*

April 26: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* by John Cameron Mitchell

Week 15, April 29 – May 3

April 29: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* by John Cameron Mitchell

May 1: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* by John Cameron Mitchell

May 3: **Assignment 5 Final**

Hedwig and the Angry Inch by John Cameron Mitchell

Exam Period May 8-17

Assignment 6 final (7-10 pages)